

12 Oct. '44

Darling,

I was just sitting down to write you yesterday when a patient arrived - another thoraco-abdominal, and in bad shape. So we spent the afternoon working on him, with very satisfactory results. Today he progresses satisfactorily. We have some captured German instruments for chest work which are a great boon, and simplify thoracic procedures immensely. Our mortality here has been very satisfactory - running less than 10%. In even less severely injured patients in civil life most big hospitals report a 55 - 65% mortality. There are several factors, of course - the patients are young and strong; penicillin is apparently working wonders; we use blood in adequate (i.e. massive) amounts; our surgery is radical and complete. Whatever the reason, it is a matter of some satisfaction, and the work carries its compensations. I think our job is the best surgical job in the army, if you don't mind a little discomfort. Bernie and Gene Record recently received their Majorities - which is swell. As team chiefs, they should have had them before. I shall probably have to sweat mine out a while, particularly in our present set-up. Arnie is doing a nice job of running the platoon, and I suspect we are caught here for the duration. It is working out okay, though, and the personnel of the unit are both good professionally and pleasant, socially, so things could be much worse.

Some amusing things occur to lighten the sombre side of war, occasionally. In Brittany, the people would always keep the graves of the newly buried American soldiers covered with flowers. One day we passed one of our former bivouac areas, and noticed a mound of hyacinths, hydrangeas, and roses on the mound of dirt beneath the wooden cross. We wondered if someone had been buried there since we left, but no, it was what we suspected. On the cross was marked in clear letters "Old latrine. Closed Aug. 17, 1944." A slight matter of language difficulty also accounted for this one - When the Free French Armored division, all in American tanks and equipment, passed through Normandy en route to the front, the people would line the streets and cheer & yell & throw flowers & cognac & kisses. They had their tanks all marked with the cross of Lorraine and named after the province or town from which the driver came - as the procession rumbled through one town, a U. S. truck of no particular distinction got mixed up in the column. "Vive la Lorraine", "Vive la Toulon", "Vive la Chateaulin" shouted the crowd in ecstasy. And then, as our truck rolled gaily by "Vive la prestone."

Some things are not so amusing. In Brittany, in the early days of the advance of our armored columns, a group of our armor knifed through a little village. The Jerries hid in the fields and woods. On the outskirts of the village a little six year old boy was herding some cows along the side of the road. As they passed, and as is their custom with children, some of the G.I.'s threw the lad some chocolate bars. That evening I went through that little town. The French people showed me the little boy. When the Jerries had come back, they had found him eating the candy bar. So they gouged his eyes out, and stuffed the



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sockets with chocolate and left him by the roadside. A little six year old boy.

The F.F.I. did not take many prisoners in that little town!

General Eisenhower's recent proclamation to the Germans in captured towns is, I think, a good augury of our attitude to come towards Germany. It's tough, and to the point. But also a warning of what we can expect there. Sniping at night - active underground activity - continued hidden resistance. The occupation of Germany will find us in a new role for which we are ill-equipped by nature - that of conquerors in a hostile nation.

I must to lunch now.

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